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ABSTRACT

Charles Cotesworth Pinckney was a wealthy South Carolinian whose profound sense of public duty obliged him to risk everything to assume a mantle of political and military leadership during the period of rebellion. This booklet on Pinckney is one in a series on Revolutionary War soldiers who later signed the U.S. Constitution. The booklet reviews covers his education and early political career, his military service as a company commander, and his political activities after the War. Personal data about Pinckney and a bibliographic essay of further readings are also included. (DJC)

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Charles Cotesworth Pinckney

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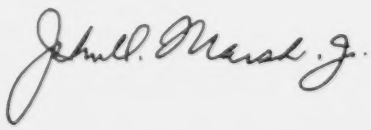
Soldier-Statesmen of the Constitution
A Bicentennial Series

Introduction

In September 1987 the United States commemorates the bicentennial of the signing of the Constitution. Twenty-two of the thirty-nine signers of the Constitution were veterans of the Revolutionary War. Their experiences in that conflict made them deeply conscious of the need for a strong central government that would prevail against its enemies, yet one that would safeguard the individual liberties and the republican form of government for which they had fought. Their solution is enshrined in the Constitution. The President of the United States is the Commander in Chief of the nation's military forces. But it is the Congress that has the power to raise and support those forces, and to declare war. The Founding Fathers established for all time the precedent that the military, subordinated to the Congress, would remain the servant of the Republic. That concept is the underpinning of the American military officer. These twenty-two men were patriots and leaders in every sense of the word: they fought the war, they signed the Constitution, and they forged the new government. They all went on to careers of distinguished public service in the new Republic. Their accomplishments should not be forgotten by those who enjoy the fruits of their labors. Nor should we forget the fortieth man whose name appears on the Constitution. The Secretary was the twenty-third Revolutionary veteran in the Convention, who continued his service to the nation as one of its first civil servants.

This pamphlet was prepared by the U.S. Army Center of Military History with the hope that it will provide you with the background of a great American; stimulate you to learn more about him; and help you enjoy and appreciate the bicentennial.



John O. Marsh, Jr.
Secretary of the Army

CHARLES COTESWORTH PINCKNEY
South Carolina

Charles Cotesworth Pinckney, who represented South Carolina at the Constitutional Convention, was an American aristocrat. Like other first families of South Carolina, whose wealth and social prominence could be traced to the seventeenth century, the Pinckneys maintained close ties with the mother country and actively participated in the royal colonial government. Nevertheless, when armed conflict threatened, Pinckney rejected Loyalist appeals and embraced the Patriot cause. Pragmatically, his decision represented an act of allegiance to the mercantile-planter class of South Carolina's seaboard, which deeply resented Parliament's attempt to institute political and economic control over the colonies. Yet Pinckney's choice also had a philosophical dimension. It placed him among a small group of wealthy and powerful southerners whose profound sense of public duty obliged them to risk everything in defense of their state and the rights of its citizens. In Pinckney's case this sense of public responsibility was intensified by his determination to assume the mantle of political and military leadership traditionally worn by members of his family.

Balancing this allegiance to his native state, Pinckney also became a forceful exponent of nationalism during the Revolutionary War. Unlike many of his contemporaries, who generously responded only when their own states were in danger, Pinckney quickly came to grasp the necessity for military cooperation on a national scale. No state was truly safe, he reasoned, unless all the states were made safe. This belief, the product of his service in the Continental Army, easily translated into a spirited defense of strong national government after the war.

THE PATRIOT

As a boy, Pinckney witnessed firsthand the close relationship between the colonial elite and the British. His father was the colony's chief justice and also served as a member of its Royal Council; his mother was famous in her own right for introducing the cultivation of indigo, which rapidly became a major cash crop in South Carolina. In 1753 the family moved to London where the elder Pinckney served as the colony's agent, in effect, as a lobbyist protecting colonial interests in political and commercial matters. Charles Cotesworth Pinckney enrolled in the famous Westminster preparatory school,

and he—with his brother Thomas—remained in England to complete his education when the family returned to America in 1758. After graduating from Christ Church College at Oxford, he studied law at London's famous Middle Temple. He was admitted to the English bar in 1769, but he continued his education for another year, studying botany and chemistry in France and briefly attending the famous French military academy at Caen.

Returning to South Carolina after an absence of sixteen years, Pinckney quickly threw himself into the commercial and political life of the colony. To supplement an income derived from plantations, he launched a successful career as a lawyer. He became a vestryman and warden in the Episcopal church and joined the socially elite 1st Regiment of South Carolina militia, which promptly elected him as lieutenant. In 1770 he won a seat for the first time in the state legislature, and in 1773 he served briefly as a regional attorney general. During this period he married Sarah Middleton, the daughter and sister of South Carolina political leaders who, respectively, would serve in the Continental Congress and sign the Declaration of Independence.

When war between the colonies and the mother country finally erupted in 1775, Pinckney cast aside his close ties with England and South Carolina's royal colonial government to stand with the Patriots. He served in the Provincial Congresses that transformed South Carolina from royal colony to independent state and in the Council of Safety that supervised affairs when the legislature was not in session. During this period Pinckney played an especially important role in those legislative committees that organized the state's military defenses.

THE SOLDIER

Directing the organization of military units from the relative safety of the state legislature did not satisfy Pinckney's sense of public obligation. Going beyond his previous militia service, he now volunteered as a full-time regular officer in the first Continental Army unit organized in South Carolina. As a senior company commander, Pinckney raised and led the elite "Grenadiers" of the 1st South Carolina Regiment. He participated in the successful defense of Charleston in June 1776, when British forces under General Sir Henry Clinton staged an amphibious attack on the state capital. Later in 1776 Pinckney took command of the regiment, with the rank of full colonel, a position he retained to the end of the war. A strong disciplinarian, he also understood the importance of troop motivation, especially when his men were forced to serve for long periods under dangerous and stressful conditions.

Following the successful repulse of General Clinton's forces in 1776, the southern states enjoyed a hiatus in the fighting while the British Army concentrated on operations in the northern and middle states. Dissatisfied with remaining in what had become a backwater of the war, Pinckney set out to join

Oil on canvas, by Henry Benbridge (c. 1773), in uniform of a militia lieutenant. National Portrait Gallery.

Washington near Philadelphia. He arrived in 1777, just in time to participate in the important military operations centering around Brandywine and Germantown. Pinckney's sojourn on Washington's staff was especially significant to his development as a national leader after the war. It allowed him to associate with key officers of the Continental Army, men like Alexander Hamilton and James McHenry, who, beginning as military comrades, would become important political allies in the later fight for a strong national government. The opportunity to form such far-reaching political alliances seldom occurred for other Continental officers from the deep south.

In 1778 Pinckney returned to South Carolina to resume command of his own regiment just as the state experienced a new threat from the British. Pinckney's 1st South Carolina joined with other Continental and militia units from several states in a successful repulse of an invasion by a force of Loyalist militia and British regulars based in Florida. But disaster ensued when a counterattack bogged down before the Patriots could reach St. Augustine. The American army suffered severe logistical problems and then a disintegration of the force itself, as senior officers bickered among themselves while disease decimated the units. Only half of the American soldiers survived to return home.

At the end of 1778 the British shifted their attention to the southern theater of operations. Their new strategy called for their regular troops to sweep north, while Loyalist units remained behind to serve as occupying forces. To frustrate this plan, the Continental Congress dispatched Major General Benjamin Lincoln to South Carolina to reorganize the army in the Southern Department. Lincoln placed Pinckney in command of one of his Continental brigades. In

that capacity Pinckney participated in the unsuccessful assault on Savannah by the Americans and their French allies in October 1779, and then in a gallant but equally unsuccessful defense of Charleston in 1780. The capture of Charleston gave the British their greatest victory, and in May Pinckney, along with the rest of Lincoln's army, became a prisoner of war.

The victors made a distinction in the treatment of prisoners. They allowed the militiamen to go home on parole while they imprisoned the continentals. Pinckney was one of the ranking officers in the prison camp established by Clinton on Haddrell's Point in Charleston Harbor. There he played a key role in frustrating British efforts to subvert the loyalty of the captured troops, who suffered terribly from disease and privation. When an effort was made to wean Pinckney himself from the Patriot cause, he scornfully turned on his captors with words that became widely quoted throughout the country: "If I had a vein that did not beat with the love of my Country, I myself would open it. If I had a drop of blood that could flow dishonourable, I myself would let it out."

Pinckney was finally freed in 1782 under a general exchange of prisoners. By that time the fighting had ended, but he remained on active duty until the southern regiments were disbanded in November 1783, receiving a brevet promotion to brigadier general in recognition of his long and faithful service to the Continental Army.

THE STATESMAN

Pinckney turned his attention to his law practice and plantations at the end of the Revolution, seeking to recover from serious financial losses suffered during his period of active service. He continued to represent the citizens of the Charleston area in the lower house of the legislature, however, a task he willingly carried out until 1790. Once again he became active in the state militia, rising to the rank of major general and commanding one of South Carolina's two militia divisions. During these years he also endured personal tragedy: his wife died in 1784, and he was wounded the following year in a duel with Daniel Huger, an event that would later lead him to advocate laws against dueling.

Pinckney made no secret of his concern over what he saw as a dangerous drift in national affairs. Freed of the threat of British invasion, the states appeared content to pursue their own parochial concerns. Pinckney was one of those leaders of national vision who preached that the promises of the Revolution could never be realized unless the states banded together for their mutual political, economic, and military well-being. In recognition of his forceful leadership, South Carolina chose him to represent the state at the Constitutional Convention that met in Philadelphia in 1787. There he joined

Washington and other nationalist leaders whom he had met during the Pennsylvania campaign. Pinckney agreed with them that the nation needed a strong central government, but he also worked for a carefully designed system of checks and balances to protect the citizen from the tyranny so often encountered in Europe. When he returned to Charleston, he worked diligently to secure South Carolina's ratification of the new instrument of government. In 1790 he then participated in a convention that drafted a new state constitution modeled on the work accomplished in Philadelphia.

Retiring from politics in 1790, Pinckney devoted himself to various religious and charitable works, including the establishment of a state university, strengthening of Charleston's library system, and the promotion of scientific agriculture. He repeatedly declined President Washington's offer of high political office, but in 1796 he finally agreed to serve as ambassador to France.

Pinckney's appointment signaled the beginning of one of the new nation's first international crises. The French government rejected his credentials, and then—in the so-called XYZ Affair—the leaders of the French Revolution demanded a bribe before agreeing to open negotiations about French interference with American shipping. Exploding at this affront to America's national honor, Pinckney broke off all discussion and returned home, where President John Adams appointed him to one of the highest posts in the new Provisional Army which Congress had voted to raise in response to the diplomatic rupture with France. As a major general, Pinckney commanded all forces south of Maryland, but his active military service abruptly ended in the summer of 1800 when a peaceful solution to the "Quasi War" between France and the United States was successfully negotiated.

Despite his earlier intention to retire, Pinckney once again became deeply involved in national and state politics. He ran unsuccessfully for vice president on the Federalist ticket in 1800 and was later defeated in presidential races won by Thomas Jefferson and James Madison. He also served for two terms in the South Carolina Senate. Until the end Pinckney remained a Federalist of the moderate stamp, seeking to preserve a balance between state and national powers and responsibilities. His tomb bears an inscription that captures the essence of his loyalty to the highest national aspirations and standards of his period: "One of the founders of the American Republic. In war he was a companion in arms and friend of Washington. In peace he enjoyed his unchanging confidence."

The Congress shall have Power . . .
To raise and support Armies . . . ;
To provide and maintain a Navy;
To provide for organizing, arming, and disciplining, the Militia . . . ;

ARTICLE I, Section 8.

Personal Data

BIRTH: 25 February 1746, at Charleston, South Carolina*
OCCUPATION: Lawyer and Planter
MILITARY SERVICE:
Colonel, Continental Army—8 years
PUBLIC SERVICE:
Major General, United States Army—2 years
Ambassador to France—2 years
DEATH: 16 August 1825, at Charleston, South Carolina
PLACE OF INTERMENT: St. Michael's Episcopal Church Cemetery, Charleston, South Carolina

*In 1752 the English-speaking world adopted the Gregorian calendar, thereby adding 11 days to the date, and changing New Year's Day from 25 March to 1 January. Thus Pinckney's date of birth was recorded in 1746 as 14 February.

Further Readings

Biographies of Pinckney include the following: Frances L. Williams, *A Founding Family: The Pinckneys of South Carolina* (1978); and Marvin R. Zahniser, *Charles Cotesworth Pinckney, Founding Father* (1967). Further details on his life and service are contained in Walter B. Edgar et al., compilers, *Biographical Directory of the South Carolina House of Representatives* (4 vols., 1974–), 2: 525–528; Charles C. Pinckney, *Life of General Thomas Pinckney* (1895); and A. S. Salley, ed., "An Orderly Book of the 1st Regt., S.C. Line, Continental Establishment," *South Carolina Historical Magazine*, 7 (1906), pp. 75–80, 130–142, 194–203, and 8 (1907), pp. 19–28, 69–87. Other books which shed light on the creation of the Constitution and the role of the military in the early history of the nation include Sol Bloom, *The Story of the Constitution* (1937); Catherine Bowen, *Miracle at Philadelphia* (1966); Alexander Hamilton, John Jay, and James Madison, *The Federalist Papers*; Don Higginbotham, *The War of American Independence* (1971); Merrill Jensen, *Making of the Constitution* (1979); Richard Kohn, *Eagle and Sword* (1975); Clinton Rossiter, *1787: The Grand Convention* (1966); US National Park Service, *Signers of the Constitution* (1976); Gordon Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic* (1969); and Robert K. Wright, Jr., *The Continental Army* (1983).

Cover: *Scene of the Signing of the Constitution of the United States*, by Howard Chandler Christy, courtesy of the Architect of the Capitol.

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